RESEARCH PAPER

Narrative Architecture: Form, Space, and the Structuring of Power in Aravind Adiga's Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Aravind Adiga uses the literary lens of space and power to portray contemporary India in his compelling narratives. Adiga's masterpieces, *The White Tiger* (2008), *Last Man in Tower* (2011), and *Selection Day* (2016) project more than socio-cultural and socio-political realities of India. These novels demonstrate the significant role of physical spaces in shaping the human experience and also draw the limits of aspiration and resistance. The present research paper examines Adiga's literary work through the lens of narrative architecture and showcases how narrative autonomously functions as structured spaces in which meaning is produced and contested. The study explores the interplay of space and power in Adiga's novels and draws on the analyses from the critical concept of social production of space by Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault's concepts of surveillance and discipline. This helps to examine how physical environments like cars, apartments, and cricket stadiums actively serve as a space for power to be enacted and contested. Spaces in the novels profoundly influence the voice, narrative structure, and perspectives of characters. Hence, spatial dynamics help to portray the complex social relationships and existence. This paper builds on previous studies of spatial narrative in Adiga's fiction by shifting the locus of study from representation of spaces to fundamental constituents of narrative design. This shows Adiga's layered structure of his narrative, where restrictions and movements, visibility and invisibility cohabit. He turns narrative into a space of the supra-consciousness to measure the power and resistance. This helps him to subtly question the system that controls rather than merely depict.

Keywords: Narrative Architecture, Spatiality, Power, Surveillance, Resistance

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INTRODUCTION: THE ARCHITECTURE OF STORYTELLING

Aravind Adiga's remarkable characteristics lie in accumulating space, society, and narrative in contemporary Indian English literature. His works, *The White Tiger* (2008), *Last Man in Tower* (2011), and *Selection Day* (2016) are the documented evidence of how human lives are shaped by the environments in which they are born and brought up. All the physical environments depicted in the novels are not passive settings. Rather, they do carry meaning, govern the plots and determine the lines where a character moves, thinks, and desires. Adiga adheres to the 'spatial turn' in his narratives, which becomes prominent in considering how narrative function (Barik and Tripathi 116). He highlights the interplay between light and darkness, freedom and confinement, visible and hidden in his narratives. All these helps him to mirror the fragmented realities of socio-cultural domains of modern India.

Researchers primarily study Adiga's works in the light of nationhood, globalisation, and corruption and discrimination. Adiga connects personal narrative to universal resonance to question the idea of progress in contemporary India. In another work, studies of spatial narratives have shown how Adiga's fictional worlds reveal the workings of power and resistance through physical and social spaces. The previous research primarily treats spaces in enriching the thematic core concern of novels. The 'form' of his narrative also serves towards spatial dynamics, which is less explored. Adiga uses epistolary techniques, shifting perspectives, and fragmented narrative to heighten his narrative from the conventional path of mere depiction. The present study extends the previous notions to examine narrative architecture in a broader spectrum. It shows that storytelling operates as an architectural space where meaning is conveyed by the organisation of plots, movements and characters' perspectives.

The present study corresponds to Henri Lefebvre's concept, that space is socially produced rather than naturally given (26), and Michel Foucault's argument that power works through visibility, surveillance, and spatial organisation (170). These concepts help in assigning the fictional spaces as deliberate sites to showcase the dual nature of power while experiencing and contesting. This helps in understanding the role of narrative voice in negotiating structures in narrative. Existing work, *Spaces of Power and Resistance: A Study of Spatial Narratives in Adiga's Novels* (Khan and Pattnaik), advocates how Adiga's geographical spaces amplify

the theme of his novels. In contrast to that, the current paper focuses on space as a form. It argues that Adiga's novel characters are shaped by their respective environment. Spaces like the car in *The White Tiger*, the apartment tower in *Last Man in Tower*, and the cricket stadium in *Selection Day* all influence how the narratives and characters understand themselves within the systems of power. In Adiga's work, the narrative itself becomes a kind of spatial act to represent the reality. The symphony of form and space in Adiga's works showcases the invisible structures of the system that shape human experiences and actions.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SPACE, POWER, AND NARRATIVE FORM

Spaces play an integral role in Adiga's novels as its produced, structured and experienced through characters' experiences. Henri Lefebvre's concept of the social production of space argues that space is not simply a physical container but 'a product' shaped through social relations, practices, and representations (26). In this light, space is governed by power. It shows dominant aspects of structural forces in organising the society and shaping individuals' experience and responses to them. This concept helps literary analysis in drawing the narrative form of spatial construction. As Robert T. Tally Jr. suggests, literary texts often function as forms of mapping and allow readers to navigate complex social and cultural realities through narrative structures. So, space is not only described within the text but also entrenched in the way the text is organised and experienced. Michel Foucault's concept further deepens this framework by highlighting the relationship between space and power. In *Discipline and Punish,* he demonstrates the systematic control and its operation through spatial arrangements, surveillance, and visibility that help to produce disciplined subjects (170). Spaces such as buildings, infrastructure and everyday environments become instruments through which power is exercised. Similarly, Foucault proposes the dispersed nature of power, which is never settled or fixed and keeps on negotiating and reconfiguring. These perspectives allow readers to unveil spaces in Adiga's novels both as material and narrative. Adiga's narrated spaces not only shape the lives of his characters but also construct narrative forms that project their environment.

III. *THE WHITE TIGER*: THE EPISTOLARY CELL AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF SURVEILLANCE

In *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga presents a narrative that is influenced by social confinement and structural forces. The novel is written through a series of letters written to Wen Jiabao, the Chinese Premier, by an Indian entrepreneur, Balram Halwai. The deliberate use of epistolary form serves more than constructing the story. It creates confined spaces for the readers to visualise the psychological progress and state of being of Balram Halwai. He addresses himself as, "I am tomorrow" (*The White Tiger*, Adiga), to position his voice within a self-conscious act of narration. He defines his existence within the confined space while knowing about his limitations. He encounters to two facets of life that he addresses as 'Darkness' and 'Light'. This binary division reflects the inequalities and disparities of two segments in the same society. Where the rich are more privileged and the poor do suffer for their basic needs of life. While addressing the Premier, "Please understand, Your Excellency, that India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness" (*The White Tiger*, Adiga). This dichotomy is not merely symbolic; it determines the fate of individuals living in society to give them access, who can move, who can be seen, and who remains trapped like a 'rooster coop'. His journey from Laxmangarh to Delhi and then Bangalore was a result of an underlying cohesive force that controls everything. As spatial analyses of Adiga's work have shown, such environments reveal how power operates through everyday spatial arrangements (Khan and Pattnaik).

The epistolary form not only provides a confined space but also strengthens the sense of surveillance and control. The confessional narrative of Balram Halwai highlights the prevalent corruption of Indian society. He identifies his struggles as the result of his low caste status, which makes him a victim of the system. He admits, "The story of my life is the story of the caste system breaking down" (*The White Tiger*, Adiga). His acknowledgement exists within the narrative structure, which gives him a reason both to speak and to conceal the oddities of the society. As per Foucauldian terms, this reflects a system in which visibility becomes a form of discipline (170). Balram writes as if he is completely free, but at the same time, his perception is very much influenced by the system that he seeks to escape.

The narrative space allows resistance and voice to a subaltern in the novel. Balram, through his letters, interprets his past life and shows an attempt to control his identity. Most of his time, he spent in a car, as the chauffeur of the zamidars. This space captures his tension in the novel. The car not only serves a space of his servitude but also a space of observation. Balram spoke, "The driver sees everything… he sees the secrets of his master" (*The White Tiger*, Adiga). He was a victim of the power; simultaneously, he sees the exercise of power in the limited space which he occupies. Thus, he dwells between the visible and the invisible. The novel highlights social mobility, entrapment and the willingness to escape from the reality within the contested space. Thus, the epistolary technique builds a confined space where both freedom and control exist together. This provides a narrative structure of creating identity and the constraints behind it to form an identity.

IV. *LAST MAN IN TOWER*: VERTICAL SPACE AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF COMMUNITY

Aravind Adiga in *Last Man in Tower*, uses Vishram society as a contested space that exists in the heart of Mumbai. The apartment building, Vishram Society, represents the community life and its fragmentation. The concept of redevelopment and lucrative offers from builders like Dharmne Shah breaks the harmony of the society. The sense of community later shifts to an individual profit-making business. It can be noted from the words of one of the residents, "Money was making people do things they had never

imagined" (*Last Man in Tower* Adiga). The vertical structure of residential buildings represents the transformation and shifting of moral values. It is not merely a physical space but a representation of a fragmented society and ethical values. The ongoing change of metropolis and the rapid shift of communal forces can easily be seen in the apartment building of Vishram society. The contested space changes the residents' perception of their home to a subject of commodity and becomes rich.

A retired school master becomes the locus of the entire narrative as he refused to bow down before the financial offer of a property dealer. His attachment to his flat was more than anything to him as it holds the memory of his late wife and time shared together with his family. The space that seems to be an opportunity for others to become rich serves as an emotional relic to Masterji. Other residents of Vishram society hold the transactional view of their residents, where Masterji came as an obstacle to their collective profit. A tension arises because of shifting values and moral stances. Adiga further takes this to a wide spectrum to mark this Urban problem that corresponds to Lefebvre's words, lived space is replaced by abstract, commodified space (26). Adiga highlights the multiple perspectives and experiences of different residents within the same space. Thus, the narrative structure itself supports the fragmentation where the narrative layers are divided and disconnected. This shows how the collective voice of the residents shifts to a hostile eye towards the individual stance of Masterji. Ultimately, this led them to commit the murder of Masterji merely for their financial gain.

Foucault's concept of dispersed power rightly helps to explain the shift in the novel, *Last Man in Tower*. The control is not exercised by single residents but by the collective pressure and mutual surveillance. The residents reciprocate to their profits and justify their actions of killing Masterji. They did not even have repentance for their act, rather they incline towards redevelopment of Urban space and financial gain. This shows how masterji's resistance becomes isolated, which later leads to his tragic death. This shows the multifacets of community from unity to disintegration in the designated space of Vishram society, apartment building. The novel reflects how space is not neutral as it influences relationships, ethical boundaries and decision making of people. The redevelopment of a building becomes a cause of social disintegration, which is beyond physical loss. Adiga, in his narrative, showcases how the space loses its value and importance when the community living in it is fractured.

V. *SELECTION DAY*: SPECTACLE, DISCIPLINE, AND THE MAKING OF THE SELF

Adiga in *Selection Day* uses the space of cricket to showcase its potential to nurture ambition, identity and success. The central characters of the novel are two brothers, Radha and Manju, and their father, Mohan Kumar. The struggles of two brothers are ironically portrayed in the novel under the imposed pressure of ambition by their father and the system. Mohan considers cricket to be a trump card for getting success, so he imposes on his two sons despite their own voices and desires. Mohan says, "you were not born to play… you were born to succeed" (*Selection Day*, Adiga). The logic behind the playing and success opens the underlying current of the novel. It shows the battle between personal desire and imposed community expectations. The spaces in the novels, such as the cricket pitch, stadium, and school premises, are not merely neutral spaces. Moreover, they function as a space for evaluation and assessment, where people are constantly judged and scrutinised. Adiga shows the constant pressure of society and family on two brothers while they are on the cricket grounds, which influences their performance as well. Manju states, "Everyone was watching… every move, every mistake" (*Selection Day* Adiga). The novel resonates with Foucault's ideas that state power operates through surveillance, where being seen becomes a way of being controlled (170). Two brothers are constantly observed and under the surveillance of their father to meet the expectations.

The spectacle of the world of cricket transforms individuals into objects of a commodity. Adiga portrays that success is not confined to skill but to recognition, self- image, and market value. The two brothers are trained to become successful players within a large system that values performance over individualism. Earlier studies on Adiga suggest that spaces reflect broader structures of power, where aspiration is closely tied to systems of control (Khan and Pattnaik). The stadium serves more than a physical space in the novel in creating identity through performance and evaluation. Manju represents the form of resistance by asking questions of the system, while Radha continues to follow the path imposed on him. Manju represents the growing discomfort and the alienation from the space where he belongs. He did not want to live a life that had been chosen by his parents. This marks a shift from submission to self-awareness. The resistance is merely internal and revealed through hesitations, doubt and eventual stepping down.

The structure of the narrative in the novel reflects the tension. Adiga shows different characters of the same system in different ways to ascertain how perspective changes and influences. The world of cricket seems unified on the surface as a dazzling field of success. At the same time, cricket carries fractures between ambition and desire, control and freedom, performance and identity under the surface. The compelling force of narrative is very much governed by the spaces of the novel. The novel, *Selection Day*, is less about success in sport and more about the stringent processes along with community force in making an individual. Thus, the cricket field becomes a space where discipline is regularised, and identity is constructed under continuous inspection. It shows the sparks of resistance within the system to a significant extent, but the scope is limited. Adiga suggests that even in controlled spaces, there are moments when individuals begin to see beyond the system, ultimately get their identity from the society itself.

Taken together, the three novels reveal a gradual shift in how space operates within Adiga's literary world. In *The White Tiger*, space is experienced through movement and confinement. Balram, the

central character, navigates between visibility and control within a tightly structured social order. *Last Man in Tower* narrows this movement into an enclosed apartment, Vishram Society. The apartment space becomes a site of collective tension and ethical disintegration. In *Selection Day*, the space is no longer occupied but actively performed, shaped by systems of discipline, visibility, and spectacle. In all the above-discussed novels, Adiga transitions from individual experiences of constrained space to the stronger institutional influences on identity. This indicates that space not only serves as a site of power exertion but also as a means through which it is internalised and perpetuated.

VI. NARRATIVE SPACE AS RESISTANCE

In Adiga's fiction, space not only influences the lives of characters but also gives them a limited scope for resistance. Adiga continuously shows how individuals are shaped by spatial systems that are achieved through confinement, hierarchy, or surveillance. There are instances where the spatial systems are questioned, reinterpreted, and fairly resisted. In this light, narrative itself becomes an important space where such resistance takes form. Henri Lefebvre's idea that space is socially produced also implies that it can be reimagined and contested (26). Similarly, Michel Foucault reminds us that where there is power, there is always the possibility of resistance, even if it emerges in dispersed and subtle ways (qtd. in Johansson and Vinthagen). Adiga's novels showcase the struggles that his characters face, but they are seldom free from the systems that shape them. The characters develop ways to navigate these frameworks through observation, withdrawal, or reimagining.

When it comes to form, the concept of space takes on more importance. The fragmented structures and shifting perspectives in these novels create spaces that challenge the prevailing narrative. Adiga rejects a singular, cohesive viewpoint, and he enables various experiences of space to coexist, highlighting its instability. The narrative not only represents resistance, but also performs it. From the analysis, it is revealed that space is not always fixed. The space remain open in the controlled system for questioning and challenging them as they define their identity. Adiga's fiction highlights the visible moments of tension and its resolutions. By doing so, he projects that resistance emerges from within not from external environments.

VII. CONCLUSION

Spaces help to interpret Adiga's novels not as a background where plots are driven, but rather the entire narrative is structured through spatial techniques. In all of his novels, *The White Tiger, Last Man in Tower*, and *Selection Day*, space emerges not as a passive backdrop but as an active force that shapes movement, perception, and identity. Each of his novels develops this idea in a distinctive way. In *The White Tiger*, the epistolary form creates a confined yet dynamic narrative space in which Balram's voice moves within the limits of surveillance and self-conscious narration. In *Last Man in Tower*, space becomes an enclosed apartment building that turns into a site of collective tension where relationships disintegrate under the influence of money. The building shows how shared space can be reshaped by competing interests. In *Selection Day*, space shifts and becomes performative and disciplinary. This shift suggests a movement from confinement to spectacle, where space becomes increasingly internalised. What begins as an external structure in *The White Tiger* gradually turns into a system that shapes thought, desire, and self-understanding in *Selection Day*.

In this progression, Adiga's fiction reveals that power is not only imposed from outside but is also absorbed and reproduced within individuals and communities. Lefebvre's concept helps to analyse Adiga's novels where space is always in the process of being produced and can therefore be reinterpreted and contested (26). Similarly, Foucault's explanation of dispersed power allows for resistance, even within highly regulated systems (170). Adiga's characters rarely achieve full liberation, but they do create moments through narration, refusal, or self-reflection. These moments may be limited, but they are significant in revealing the fractures within systems of control. Adiga's work distinguishes the way it brings together form and space. Adiga's novels shows the interplay of structure, experience, and narration that offers a compelling understanding of how power operates in contemporary life and highlights the scope for resistance. This nuanced exploration involves readers to reflect on their subjective experiences and the complexities of the world around them.

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